WHEN THE GOTHS WERE IN EGYPT: A GOTHIC BIBLE FRAGMENT AND BARBARIAN SETTLEMENT IN SIXTH-CENTURY EGYPT

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Abstract: This essay begins with a discussion of a sixth-century Gothic Bible fragment unearthed in Antinoë, Egypt. It argues that a group of barbarians who took lucrative positions as private troops most likely transported the book to Egypt. Procopius, in particular, provides ample evidence for barbarian redeployment across the Mediterranean. This hypothesis is further supported by contemporaneous papyri which reference a Gothic detachment on the Apion family estate in Oxyrhynchus as well as the presence of other barbarians, including Franks, in Egypt around the age of Justinian. These small communities had close relations with the landed elite, were marked by their group identity, and possibly retained their own clergy. Ultimately, the essay asks early medievalists to take a Mediterranean-wide perspective in their narration of barbarian history.

Keywords: Goths, Barbarians, Justinian, Egypt, Apion Estate, barbarian recruitment, Buccellarii, public and private, Procopius, Byzantine army.

INTRODUCTION

It is a useful reminder that the modern encyclopedic museum originates in the cabinets of curiosities of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European nobles. At the heart of the exposition of our grand narratives, our canon, and our periodization lies "the oddity": those rare, exotic, or bizarre relics rendered conversations pieces. Among them is a small parchment fragment discovered in Antinoë, Egypt in 1907. One side of the now-lost fragment had a few Latin lines from Luke 23–24 in a clear uncial hand, and the other bore the letters of the Gothic language.[1] Given that few with the exception of Germanic linguists can read Gothic, the first cataloguers quite reasonably assumed the text to be an illegible Coptic scribble. Soon, however, the New Testament scholar Paul Glaue and the medievalist Karl Helm recognized the East Germanic language. In 1910 they published an edition of the fragment that is now called by convention the *Codex Gissensis*, providing scholars a witness to two unattested chapters of Ulfilas's Gothic translation of the Bible. Their edition with facsimiles of the original is all the more valuable today since flooding destroyed the fragment in 1945.

The journey of this mysterious text seemingly misplaced among the Egyptian sands has generated relatively little interest among scholars. This is not entirely surprising. On the one hand, the loss of the manuscript fragment further narrowed the circle of

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[1] Paul Glaue and Karl Helm, "Das gotisch-lateinische Bibelfragment der Grossherzoglichen Universitätsbibliothek Gießen," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde des Urchristentums* 11 (1910) 1–38. For an updated reconstruction of the lost fragment, see Magnús Snædal, "The Gothic Text of Codex Gissensis," *Gotica Minora*, vol. 2, ed. Christian Petersen (Frankfurt 2003) 1–20. For the catalogue entry from Giessener, see "5.9. Gotisch–lateinisches Bibelfragment," *Die Giessener literarischen Papyri und die Caracalla–Erlasse; Text, Ubersetzung und Kommentar*, ed. P. Kuhlmann (Giessen 1994) 196–207. Scardigli and Manfredi provide an excellent paleographical study of the fragment, even if their analysis is sparing on context, see Piergiuseppe Scardigli and Manfredo Manfredi, "Note sul frammento gotico–latino di Giessen," *Geist und Zeit: Wirkungen des Mittelalters in Literatur und Sprache: Festschrift für Roswitha Wisniewski zu Wisniewski zu ihrem 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Carola Gottzman and Herbet Kolb (Frankfurt 1991) 419–437.

those interested to linguists, that is, scholars with little engagement to the fragment's Egyptian context. On the other hand, the Egyptologists who have revolutionized our knowledge of late antique Egypt would rarely encounter editions of the *Codex Gissensis*; nor would medievalists interested in barbarian history and state formation comb the records for Goths in Egypt. The most recent catalogue entry for the now-lost fragment best summarizes the state of scholarship: "It remains an open question how this fragment whose text and style are so very much connected to Italy could end up in Egypt."[2]

As with so many of the curious pieces now in the world's museums, this fragment's provenance cannot be fixed with absolute certainty. That said the question is not as open or futile as scholars have imagined. In this essay I argue that a group of Goths displaced by Justinian's wars transported the bilingual Bible to their new home in sixth-century Egypt. To do so, I place the fragment in dialogue with narrative sources that attest to the trans-Mediterranean movement of barbarian auxiliaries, as well as with papyri that reveal the presence of barbarians, including Goths and Franks, as a labor force for Byzantine elites in Egypt. Given the luxury status of the Bible fragment and the connectivity of westerners to wealthy estates, it seems to be the case that sixth-century barbarians still constituted a mobile, military class who could command some social standing for their martial skills. In this way, the fragment serves as a useful conversation starter about the continued integration of the late antique Mediterranean.

From the Apennines to the Apions

The story of our Gothic fragment and the Germanic barbarians in Egypt begins in Italy of the early sixth century. Paleographical evidence, such as the recognizable uncial and a textual relationship with other Italian "Gothic" Bibles, leaves little doubt that the *Codex Gissensis* was produced in Ostrogothic Italy, probably near the court at Ravenna.[3] The reign of Theodoric the Great (493–526) was an age of artistic patronage and renewal, during which the barbarian king built upon centuries of Roman tradition. From the renovation of the theater of Pompey to the production of deluxe Bibles and circus games, Theodoric legitimized his rule through the employ of cultural icons and artifacts that asserted his civility to Italian elites.[4] The period of peace and patronage, however, did not survive his death for long. Belisarius's invasion in 534 brought thousands of hostile soldiers to Italian shores. The fall of Ravenna in 540 and the subse-

[2] Kuhlmann (n. 1 above) 202: "Als offene Frage bleibt, wie dieses in Schrift und Textgestaltung so sehr mit Italien verbundene Fragment nach Ägypten gelangen konnte."

[3] All other extant Gothic manuscripts are associated with the Ostrogothic kingdom. The fine uncial bears a striking resemblance to the more famous *Codex Argenteus* as well as the *Codex Brixianus*. Kulhman (n. 1 above) 200; The Latin version of Luke used here does not come from the Vulgate, but rather follows the *Vetus Latina* found in the sixth-century *Codex Brixianus*, whose Latin has been influenced by Ulfilas's Gothic Bible. F. C. Burkitt, "The Vulgate Gospels and the *Codex Brixianus*," *Journal of Theological Studies* 1 (1900) 129–134; G. W. S. Friedrichsen, *The Gothic Version of the Gospels: A Study of its Style and Textual History* (London 1926) 169–211.

[4] The best overview of Theodoric's reign and Italy's prosperity under him is John Moorhead's *Theodoric in Italy* (Oxford 1992). For Theodoric's cultural program, see Yitzhak Hen, *Roman Barbarians: The Royal Court and Culture in the Early Middle Ages* (New York 1997) 27–58. For the cultivation of a Gothic civility in a Roman fashion, see Herwig Wolfram, *A History of the Goths*, trans. Thomas Dunlap (Berkeley 1990) 288–290; see also Patrick Amory, *People and Identity in Ostrogothic Italy, 489–554* (Cambridge 2003) 49–85.

quent fifteen years of warfare devastated the peninsula and scattered local populations across the Mediterranean.[5] The wake of Justinian's war created such a whirlpool of soldiers, refugees, and captives that the transportation of a deluxe Gothic Bible to Egypt should not come as a surprise, but such a dispersion of luxury goods should be expected.

We know from other sources that some refugees of Theodoric's regime made their way to Egypt. Procopius, for instance, tells us of a certain Goth named Goar who was picked up by imperial forces in the 530s and taken to Constantinople, only to be exiled again to Antinoë during the 540s.[6] This "Gothos anēr" is a particularly relevant testament to the distances a westerner, even a barbarian, could travel on the imperial conveyer of the Mediterranean—although we need not assume that our Bible ever belonged to him. Another chance survival of the desert, papyrus PSI VIII 953, a 567/8 administrative account of the Apion family estate near Oxyrhynchus, provides even firmer evidence for an Italian Gothic presence in Egypt. In this extensive fragment, we find repeated allotments of rations for "Gothic boys (παιδάρια) and their wives and the others with an expense contract."[7] The same fragment also budgets wine for a series of *bucellarii*, i.e., private soldiers, including a certain "Martinus, who comes from among the Ravennesi" (τῶν Ῥαβεννησίων).[8]

The question becomes then what brought Martin and the Goths to Egypt: a search for gainful employment, the captor's chains, or a mix of the two? The social status of the Goths listed as *paidaria* is not entirely obvious. Quite literally *paidarion* means "slave" or "boy," but the technical meaning of the term is a matter of debate. Given that the term is a diminutive of παῖς, or "slave," Peter Sarris makes the "natural inference" that "the *paidaria* were of an unfree, servile condition."[9] Similarly, Kyle Harper sees the *paidaria* of PSI VIII 953 as "listed in explicit contrast to the 'free' workers" on the estate, but he concedes that "half a millennium is plenty of time for semantic evolution."[10] If Sarris and Harper are correct, then these Goths are the servile staff of the Apion estate and we should imagine a much humbler, less martial community. In opposition to more literal readings of the term, Jairus Banaji interprets *paidaria* as the domestic and administrative staff that performed a myriad of tasks and explicitly received wine rations for their labor.[11] The papyrologist Todd Hickey, who recently took scholars to task for selective interpretations of estate jargon, has shown that consist-

[5] For a colorful, brief summary of Justinian's Italian quagmire, see James. J. O'Donnell, *The Ruin of the Roman Empire* (New York 2009) 257–270. Wickham imagines a much smaller scale of destruction than Procopius describes; Chris Wickham, *Early Medieval Italy* (Ann Arbor 1992) 26. For the refugees and last years of the Gothic kingdom, see Ludwig Schmidt, *Die letzten Ostgoten* (Berlin 1943); Amory (n. 4 above) 182.

[6] Procopius, *De bellum Gothico* 4.27.5–18; in H. B. Dewing, ed. and trans., *A History of the Wars* (Cambridge 1914–40). Also see Amory (n. 4 above) 377–378; J. R. Martindale, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, vol. 3A (Cambridge 1992) 538–539.

[7] All papyri cited in this piece have been digitized and can be found at www.papyri.info. PSI VIII 953.17: τοῖς πα[ιδα]ρ(ίοις) Γόθθ(*)(οις) καὶ γυναιξ(ὶν) καὶ ἄλλ(οις) λόγ(ῳ) ἀ[ναλ(ώματος)]; also 32, 46, 47, 84.

[8] Ibid. 35–36: τοῖς ἄλλ(οις) γ βουκκ(*)(ελλαρίοις) Μαρτίνῳ [τ]ῶν Ῥαβεννησ(ίων) καὶ …

[9] Peter Sarris, *Economy and Society in the Age of Justinian* (Cambridge 2006) 40.

[10] Kyle Harper, *Slavery in the Late Roman World, 275–425* (Cambridge 2011) 174 n. 137.

[11] Jairus Banaji, *Agrarian Change in Late Antiquity Gold, Labour, and Aristocratic Dominance* (Oxford 2002) 186.

ently in later papyri *paidaria* signifies dependent, but nevertheless free-status labor.[12] In the case of PSI VIII 953, Hickey points to a distinction between the *paidaria* (private guards stationed on the estate) and *bucellarii* (private soldiers deployed away from Oxyrhynchus, possibly on state business).[13] Why would the Apion accountants even need to distinguish the ethnicity of a group of slave laborers if they did not have an employment arrangement as a community unit? The allotment to the *paidaria* of 219 *dipla* per month places them below the *bucellarii* rate, but not so much as to suggest they were unskilled slaves.[14] Deployed troops would have received higher wages that would be accounted separately from those of the private guards and estate staff still at home. The exile of the above-mentioned Goar, an upper-echelon Goth to Antinoë, the widespread employment of Goths as warriors for elites such as Belisarius, and the survival of a deluxe manuscript fragment at Antinoë seem to corroborate Hickey's hypothesis that these are paid soldiers and workers.

The Apion payroll also offers us a basis for estimating the size of the expatriate community. By Todd Hickey's calculation, the monthly distribution of 219 *dipla* of wine for the *paidaria Gothica*, would have been enough for seventy-three adult men. The inclusion of the "γυναίκες" and any accompanying children could easily double the total number of Goths to around 150.[15] It is unclear whether the *paidaria* excluded any Goths among the *bucellarii* who were placed into a different accounting category. If some Goths made up a portion of the *buccellarii,* our estimate would have to be increased again, possibly even doubled. We are talking then about several hundred individuals.[16]

To recapitulate, within one generation of the destruction of the Ostrogothic kingdom, we find on the dole of a single elite Roman family an unspecified number of Gothic men and women, as well as a Latin-named individual from Ravenna. Moreover, the latter is said to be "from among the Ravennesi," which suggests that a larger group of persons from Ravenna lived in the area, or that there were sufficient quantities of western émigrés to warrant calling them by city of origin. We should also suspect that some of *buccellarii* not included in the Gothic *paidaria* were Germanic, or at least had some connection to the defunct Ostrogothic regime. This large amount of circumstantial evidence supports the hypothesis that the codex was owned and transported by Goths. While it is not necessary to assume the manuscript ever belonged to the Oxyrhynchite Goths or that a Goth owned it after its arrival in Egypt, the existence of so large a community on one of the wealthiest estates in Egypt makes for a thought-provoking possibility: a Latin-speaking Gothic congregation in sixth-century Egypt.

[12] Todd Hickey, *Wine, Wealth, and the State in Late Antique Egypt: The House of Apion at Oxyrhynchus* (Ann Arbor 2012) 130–133.

[13] Ibid. 150–151.

[14] See Hickey's chart of military distributions, ibid. 125–126.

[15] Ibid. 131.

[16] Belisarius for instance had 7000 *buccellarii*, including Goths. Procopius, *De bello Gothico* (n. 6 above) 3.1.18–20; Wolfram (n. 4 above) 354; for general uses of the Goths as *buccellarii,* see 175, 231, 240 276.

An Arian Community

The few scholars who have worked on the fragment have all strived to place the object in an ecclesiastical context. The editors Glaue and Helm entertained the possibilities that they had discovered a "regimental Bible" for a Gothic battalion or that a lone Arian priest had clung to the codex on his quest for the asylum of a desert monastery.[17] Piergiuseppe Scardigli suspects this fragment is evidence for Arian proselytism to Orthodox Christians in the period, although this claim seems unfounded.[18] The presence in Egypt of western barbarians and *buccellarii* on a wealthy estate suggests a novel hypothesis, one that synthesizes earlier conjectures, namely that Gothic soldiers-turned-mercenaries moved to Egypt with an accompanying clergyman.

Given our knowledge of ancient literacy, neither the Latin nor the Gothic on the Bible would have been intelligible to common soldiers or peasants, and the appreciation of the object—carried to Egypt and not sold off in Italy for plunder—suggests an interest in the Bible beyond its resale value.[19] Indeed, all the Gothic texts preserved for us today (188 folios in all) are religious in nature. Most are copies of Ulfilas's translation of the Bible, but an Arian commentary on the Gospel of John, the so-called *Skeireins* and a liturgical calendar survive too. Let us also not forget that the *Codex Gissensis* was a deluxe manuscript from the same milieu as the famed *Codex argenteus*. A religious community or pious individual spent a considerable fortune on this Bible, and we should understand it then as a durable luxury good. On its way to Egypt someone chose to save it, buy it, or collect it. Barring its worth as a veteran's war token or as an object of antiquarian interest, it offered the greatest value to a member of the Arian-Gothic clergy.

As Patrick Amory has convincingly argued, written Gothic by the age of Theodoric had undergone a process of "ossification," becoming a ceremonial language used by the clergy.[20] He based this assertion on two papyrus deeds from Ravenna (*P.Ital.* 34 and *P.Dip.* 118) that contain witness-statements in Latin and Gothic. Out of nineteen total signers, only four of the members of the *ecclesia legis Gothorum* witnessed the Latin transactions with Gothic subscriptions. More tellingly, the four Gothic statements are almost identical, obviously drawn from formulae, while the Latin subscriptions vary in fluent prose. Latin was the living language, Gothic the ceremonial one.[21] If an Egyptian Arian community wanted to have their liturgy performed in Gothic, as

[17] Glaue and Helm (n. 1 above) 4–6. To this hypothesis, Peter Kuhlman and others have curtly rejoined that Arians shun away from asceticism, although this point has been challenged by modern scholarship; Kuhlmann (n. 1 above) 2; On Arian ascetic and monastic tendencies, see Susanna Elm, *Virgins of God: The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford 1994; repr. 1996) 106–136.

[18] Piergiuseppe Scardigli, *Die Goten. Sprache und Kultur* (Munich 1971) 182. In addition to not keeping with Ostrogothic religious policy, this neither explains the specific movement from Italy to Egypt nor the usefulness of a Latin Bible to evangelize in the east; for the religious policies of Theodoric's kingdom, see Wolfram (n. 4 above) 327–328; and John Moorhead (n. 4 above) 97–100.

[19] On account of their material costs and scarcity books were exceedingly valuable in late antiquity. See Chrysi Kotsifou, "Books and Book Production in the Monastic Communities of Byzantine Egypt," *The Early Christian Book*, ed. William Klingshirn and Linda Safran (Washington, DC 2007) 48–66, at 62–63. For papyri evidence on contested book ownership and the arbitration around it, see Susanna Elm, "An Alleged Book Theft in Fourth-Century Egypt: *P.Lips. 43*," *Studia patristica* 18 (1989) 209–215.

[20] Amory (n. 4 above) 251.

[21] Ibid. 252–253.

Germanic Arians seemed to have preferred, they would need their own priest and a Gothic Bible.[22]

The religious and social structures of late antique Egypt would have allowed for a minority community, such as Arian Goths, to retain its autonomy and unique style of worship. There is ample evidence for independent *Eigenkirchen* in Egypt; the Apion family bureaucrats, for instance, managed and supported several churches on their Oxyrhynchus estates.[23] Further, Procopius is quite unequivocal that Arian congregations preserved their churches and their endowments on the houses, villages, and estates of wealthy and connected benefactors.[24] Justinian attempted to squash these challenges to ecclesiastical unity by preventing Arians from bequeathing and inheriting property, especially land.[25] Individual landowners though did not necessarily fund and protect Arian churches out of their own religious convictions. Private Romans, such as Valentinian II's mother Justina, had for some time made religious accommodations for their barbarian retinues who did not share their faith but were nevertheless clients of the family.[26]

Crossing the Mediterranean

How might the Goths on the Apion estate, an Arian priest, and our manuscript have made their way to Egypt? The narrative sources of the period, especially Procopius, abound with stories of Italian émigrés. For example, the senator Cassiodorus and Theodoric's granddaughter Matasuntha weathered the turbulent years in Constantinople. Italian civilians across the social ladder likely followed suit, as they had done earlier during the Visigothic and Vandal sacks. With regard to the fragment, we should keep in mind that clerics often saved relics and other possessions of the church amidst barbarian sieges.[27] Why would barbarian Christians have not done the same?

We should also not forget on this point the military status of Goths in the Roman world or the twenty years of wars that had jolted the Mediterranean. The Goths had been soldiers of the Roman Empire for almost 200 years, and there is a well-documented tradition of barbarian units having their own clergy accompany them on de-

[22] When the Vandal king Geiseric lobbied Emperor Zeno for the toleration of Arianism within the empire, he requested that the Arians be allowed to perform mass in their language of choice, presumably Gothic. Victor of Vita, *Historia persecutionis africanae provinciae*, ed. Serge Lancel, *Histoire de la persecution vandale en Afrique* (Paris 2002) 1.4.20. A fifth-century liturgical calender in the *Codex Ambrosianus* also suggets the ceremonial use of Gothic; Scardigli (n. 18 above) 162–164.

[23] For an overview of the *Eigenkirchen* in the Byzantine world, see John Philip Thomas, *Private Religious Foundations in Byzantine Empire* (Washington, DC 1987) 59–109, at 63.

[24] Procopius, *The Secret History*, trans. H. B. Dewing (Cambridge, MA 1935) 11.14–23. Thomas (n. 23 above) 34–35.

[25] Ibid. 34–35. For the orthodox ideology undergirding Justinian's reforms, see Michael Maas, "Roman History and Christian Ideology in Justinianic Reform Legislation," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 40 (1986) 17–31.

[26] Ambrose documents this specific case in his *Ep. 20.* For an examination of the tensions between Ambrose and the imperial family over the matter, see Andrew Lenox–Conyngham, "The Topography of the Basilica Conflict A.D. 385/6 in Milan," *Historia* 31 (1982) 353–63. Also see Ralph Mathisen, "Ricimer's Church in Rome: How an Arian Barbarian Prospered in a Nicene World," *The Power of Religion in Late Antiquity*, ed. Andrew Cain and Noel Lenski (Burlington, VT 2009) 307–326.

[27] Wolf Liebeschuetz, "The Refugees and Evacuees in the Age of Migrations," *The Construction of Community in the Early Middle Ages: Texts, Resources, and Artefacts* 65–80, ed. Richard Corradini, Maximilian Diesenberger, and Helmut Reimitz (2002) 68.

ployment.[28] Indeed, service to the Roman state and its elite had not only helped crystalize barbarian groups around the strongmen patronized by the Roman state, but the very terms *barbarus* and *Gothicus* had come to signify military service. The ethnic monikers for the military units listed in the *Notitia dignitatum*, no matter how unreliable the document may be, demonstrate the degree to which barbarians constituted the "Roman Army."[29] If Gothic men with their families left Ostrogothic Italy during or after the re-conquest, they likely left as soldiers of one type or another.

Procopius describes ample desertion and side-switching during Justinian's Gothic wars. Allegiance to military employment *as such* and the lucrative payment that came with it outweighed any ethnic loyalty to the Gothic cause. The besieged Goths of Urbino, for instance, surrendered to the Romans with the condition "that they should become subjects of the emperor on terms of complete equality with the Roman army."[30] Similarly, the Goths at Osimo are said to have "mingled with the emperor's army."[31] Even elite commanders (*duces*) of the Gothic army such as Pitzas or Sisigis defected to the Byzantine side, taking their forces with them. The collapse of the Gothic kingdom would have only hastened the transfer of troops. The emperor himself apparently had no misgivings about conscripting vanquished enemies. Procopius tells us that Justinian "settled permanently in the cities of the east" five cavalry units of Vandals taken in Belisarius's 534 reconquest of Africa. He even went as far as giving the units the eponymous designation the Βάνδαλοι Ἰουστινιάνοι, his private "Vandals."[32] These cavalrymen were still stationed on the Persian frontier as late as 550, when Procopius was finishing *Wars* I–VII.[33]

Any redeployed Goths would have found more senior Germanic brethren among their new cohorts. Although Anastasius had gone to great efforts to reestablish a professional, "native" Roman army, barbarians were never completely purged from the imperial ranks. Anastasius's reforms did attract many volunteers to the army, and thus the prevalent use of barbarian mercenaries as well as forced conscriptions seem to have abated;[34] however, the exigencies of Justinian's reign, namely bouts of plague and expansionist wars, necessitated heavy barbarian recruitment. As early as 527 Justinian had made allowances for Arians, who would almost exclusively be Germanic, to stay in his "orthodox" army.[35] In addition to the demographic blows of the 541 and 548 plague outbreaks, Justinian's fall into arrears for army pay had repeatedly

[28] For a discussion of Arian clergy among Germanic troops, See Ralph Mathisen, "Barbarian Bishops and the Churches '*in barbaricis gentibus*' during Late Antiquity," *Speculum* 72 (1997) 664–697.

[29] See Michael Kulikowski, "The 'Notitia Dignitatum' as a Historical Source," *Historia* 49 (2000) 358–377. Treadgold is more optimistic about producing a reasonable estimate of the size and arrangement of the Eastern army in the 5th and 6th c.; see Treadgold (n. 29 above) 44–49.

[30] Procopius, *De bello Gothico* (n. 6 above) 2.19.17; Here I have borrowed Amory's alteration to the Dewing translation of Procopius. Amory (n. 4 above) 168.

[31] Procopius, *De bello Gothico* (n. 6 above) 2.27.31–34.

[32] Ibid. *de Bello Vandalico* (n. 6 above) 2.14.17.

[33] For the dating, see Averil Cameron, *Procopius and the Problem of the Sixth Century* (New York 1985; repr. 1996) 9.

[34] Treadgold (n. 29 above) 15, 153–154; A. H. M. Jones, *History of the Later Roman Empire*, vol. 1 (Norman, OK 1964; repr. 1986) 664–679.

[35] Paul Krüger, *Codex Justinianus* (Berlin 1877) 1.5.12.17.

prompted desertions.[36] It is therefore no surprise that we find Germanic soldiers across the ranks of the Byzantine army. We know, for example, of at least three ranking soldiers in John Troglita's African army with Germanic names: Fronimuth, Geisirith, and Sinduit.[37] Germanic enlistment, moreover, was not limited to the west. The *Magister militum* and *Patricius* Sittas (d. 538/9), who first commanded Justinian's new Armenian army, was likely a Goth, as was his replacement Dorotheus.[38] Needless to say, there is ample evidence for the sixth-century use of Germanic auxiliaries across the Mediterranean.

The redeployment of Germanic troops from the Balkans and the Latin west to the east not only buttressed the shaky Persian frontier, but neutralized the threat of Germanic soldiers creating local power bases near their homes. The Goths of Italy, for instance, were rumored to have offered Belisarius a crown as their king before his quick recall to Constantinople.[39] The relocation of populations, especially former enemies, to militarized frontiers would become a staple of later Byzantine foreign policy.[40]

The "Fifty-Year Peace" of 561 with the Persians freed Justinian's hand to use the eastern *limitanei* on other frontiers, and it is precisely at this time that the nomadic tribes of southern Egypt and Nubia, the dreaded Blemmyes, increased their raiding on the Thebaid.[41] The limited narrative accounts from the sixth-century leave us in the dark about the specifics of the empire's response, but we do know that Justinian had already established new elite "barbarian units" such as the *Numidai Iustiniani* in Hermopolis and the *Scythai Iustiniani* in Apollonopolis during the 530s, to defend the Thebaid from incursions.[42] Given Justinian's penchant for naming units after their ethnic constituencies, we should imagine that these troops were largely Numidians and Scythians, or at least those individuals who aligned themselves with these communities. If by the 560s the two contingents settled by Justinian had proven insufficient, there were plenty of inactive soldiers across the empire to redeploy. The units stationed in now-quieted Italy and those resettled soldiers of the east, such as Gothic

[36] For an overview of 6th-c. recruitment, see Michael Whitby, "Recruitment in Roman Armies from Justinian to Heraclius (ca. 565–615)," in Averil Cameron, ed., *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East, vol. 3: States, Resources, and Armies* (Princeton 1995) 61–124. For barbarians in the army, see John Teall, "Barbarians in Justinian's Army," *Speculum* 40 (1965) 294–322; Treadgold (n. 29 above) 16–17. For Arianism in the army, see Walter Kaegi, "Arianism and the Byzantine Army in Africa, 533–546," *Traditio* 21 (1965) 23–53.

[37] See Jonathan Conant, *Staying Roman: Conquest and Identity in Africa and the Mediterranean, 439–700* (Cambridge 2012) 209 and n. 62.

[38] Martindale (n. 6 above) 3B 1160; Teall (n. 36 above) 298.

[39] Procopius, *De bello Gothico* (n. 6 above) 2.29.17–18; 30.1–2; Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitome Historiarum*, ed. L. Dindorf (Leipzig 1868 –1875) 14.9.

[40] Liebeschuetz (n. 28 above) 79.

[41] Robert Remondon, "Soldats de Byzance d'apres un papurs trouvé a Edfou," *Recherches de papyrologie* (1961) 41–93, esp. 72–79. Remondon calls the hostilities the "Third Blemmyan War," based on a petition from the city of Omboi to *the dux et Augustalis Thebaidis Flavius Athanasius* (*Cair.Masp.* I 67004). Dijkstra and Palme are doubtful about his "forced readings"; Bernhard Palme, "The Imperial Presence: Government and Army," *Egypt in the Byzantine World, 300–*700, ed. Roger Bagnall (Cambridge 2010) 244–270, at 259; Jitse Dijkstra, *Religious Encounters on the Southern Egyptian Frontier in Late Antiquity (AD 298–642)* (Groningen 2005) 154.

[42] Palme (n. 41 above) 259; Jean Gascou, *Un codex fiscal Hermopolite (P.Sorb II 69)* (Atlanta 1994) 326 n. 12.

captives or *Justinian's Vandals*, would have been accessible troop reservoirs for the new theater of war.

Expectedly, Germanic names such as Tangila and Illerich began to appear in Egyptian papyri as soldiers on the dole of local officials, and a funerary inscription from Apollonopolis speaks of a presumably Gothic Rigimer as a member of the Scythian *numerus* (ἀριθμὸς).[43] On these grounds, Robert Remondon first suggested in 1961 that Justinian deployed a battalion of Goths, or at least warriors from the Balkans, as a "mobile striking force" in the Thebaid to buttress the established units drawn from local recruits.[44] Amidst the scattered evidence, these units are not visible for long. As John Teall sees it, "the raids of the Blemmyes were neither sufficiently numerous nor sufficiently threatening to keep the barbarian *foederati* in fighting trim ... [they simply] sank into the normal routine of provincial life."[45] This may have been the case, since the quick transition from farmer to soldier and vice versa is well attested in antiquity.[46] Yet, it is equally as probable that a barbarian soldier, or perhaps the whole unit, would have taken to private military services.

In Einem Anderen Land

How typical was the use of barbarian mercenaries, especially Germanic ones, by the affluent households of Egypt? The surviving papyri from the 560s offer a raucous picture of Egypt, one abounding with barbarians of one sort or another.[47] About 100 kilometers down the Nile from the Oxyrhynchite Goths, near Antinoë and our fragment's resting place, plenty of barbarians found employment as private soldiers for the Egyptian landed elites. For instance, one finds a draft petition of 567 from the inhabitants of Aphrodito to Flavius Marianos, against the actions of Menas the *pagarch* of Antaiopolis and his "barbarian" employees, complaining:

> The same *pagarch* seized the communal goods and about 200 *numismata,* but having giving us his word on the matter, he planned to do otherwise with the piratical aid of rustic soldiers (ληστρικῆς τε καὶ παγανικῆς καὶ στρᾳτιωτικῆς βοηθείας). He devastated the village, having plundered it in full with his barbarians and burned the "Shining Bright" estates of the great ancient landowners of the village ...[48]

The litany of wrongs continues for some length. Menas, as the plaintiffs saw it, had gone beyond the limits of his legitimate power by "despoiling the whole village and its environs as though they were in barbarian lands."[49] By using his own country thugs (ληστρικῆς τε καὶ παγανικῆς καὶ στρᾳτιωτικῆς βοηθείας) Menas had abandoned the Roman civility of his office and led the community into barbarian lawlessness. The

[43] George Lefebvre, *Recueil des inscriptions grecques–chrétiennes d'Egypte* (Cairo 1907) no. 559.
[44] Remondon (n. 41 above) 75.
[45] Teall (n. 36 above) 322.
[46] See Ramsay Macmullen, *Soldier and Civilian in the Later Roman Empire* (Cambridge 1963) 1–22.
[47] Gascou (n. 42 above) 155. Remondon (n. 41 above) *passim*.
[48] *P.Cair. Masp*. I 67002.23–4: ὁ αὐτὸς πάγαρχος ἔλαβεν τὸ δημ[όσι]ον καὶ ἄλλα ἐπὶ το(ῦ)τῳ διακόσια νομίσματα, δε[δ]ωκὼς ἡμῖν λόγον ἐπὶ το(ύ)τῳ, εὐθέως τοναντίον(*) ἐφρόντιζεν ἀνελθὼν μετὰ πολλῆς ληστρικῆς τε καὶ παγανικῆς καὶ [στ]ρᾳτι[ωτ]ικῆς βοηθεί[ας]· ἐπραίτευσεν(*) τὴν κώμ[η]ν διαπορθήσας πλέον β[αρ]βάρων καὶ ἔμπρησας φανερὰ λαμπρὰ \οἰκήματα/ τῶν ἀρχαίων κτητόρων μεγάλων τῆς κώμης …
[49] Ibid. 3.4: [λ]ελατήσαντες τὴν πᾶσαν κώμην καὶ τὴν ταύτης ἐνορίαν ὡς ἐπὶ τῶν βαρβαρωθέντων τόπων.

villagers were not Menas' only victims. Around the same time the monks of Psinepois complained separately to an unknown ecclesiastical official about Menas and his military-rustic detachment (στρατιωτικῆς καὶ παγανικῆς βοηθείας).[50] The frightened villagers and monks, it seems, feared the barbarians of the local *pagarch* more than any exotic raiders.

Elsewhere in the Thebaid we hear of similar abuses of power by officials. Sometime between 567 and 570, the residents of either Antinopolis or Antaiopolis began drafting a formal complaint to the *dux* of the Thebaid that railed against the oppression of their local *stratēgos* Florentios. In the fragmentary draft the townspeople complain about an unnamed "soldier of the number of those Scythian-born" (ὁ στρατιώτης τοῦ ἀριθμου τῶν γενναιοτάτων Σκυθῶν), whose title surely places him among Justinian's Scythians. This misbehaving soldier seems to have enrolled the services of "sinful Saracens" (οἱ ἀλιτήριοι Σαρακήνοι) in his mischief.[51] Interestingly enough, the petitioners reminded the *dux* of his "noble benevolence" at an earlier time when "the sinful Blemmyan barbarians of their **own** former stock" had ravaged the area.[52]

Although, with Blemmyans and Saracens nearby, a local bureaucrat would not have to search far afield to hire barbarians and rustics, the upheavals of Justinian's wars and the subsequent peace with Persia would have left a glut of employable troops, including Germanic captives and veterans. A papyrus fragment from Hermopolis *P.Vindob. G* 14307, found only a few miles from Antinoë, sheds particular light on the new arrivals to the Thebaid in the second half of the sixth century. In it one finds the first attestation on papyrus of the term Φράγγοι, that is, Franks. The fragment, which Bagnall and Palme published in 1996, is worth quoting in its entirety:

> Would Your Excellency please give the letter to our master the Most Magnificent Count. For His Magnificence should [assist?] me with his colleague, [asking him to release NN?] son of Horigenes from the jail. For, although he has *a logos* from His Magnificence (sealed) by His finger ring, through Belisarius, some of the Franks (τινες τῶν Φραγγῶν) arrested him. The same Franks gave me their word, in the [holy?] church, that "we are not treating him improperly", but they acted illegally and arrested him. But would Your Excellency please join in asking [on his behalf?]. The men allowed me to be appointed to the task of collection. I pray for your health.[53]

The reference to an official named Belisarius points to a *terminus post quem* of at least twenty or thirty years after the celebrated victories of Belisarius in the 530s, so we can safely assume the text comes from at least the 550s or later.[54] Thus, like our Goths in Oxyrhynchus, the Franks in the Thebaid are attested within a generation or two of Justinian's wars.

The fragment's editors nevertheless are skeptical that the offending soldiers in question could have been ethnically Franks at so late a date, and have laid a strong

[50] *P.Cair. Masp*. I 67021.8–10.

[51] *P.Cair. Masp*. I 67009. r20–21.

[52] Ibid. v17–18: διδάσκωμεν(*) τὴν ὑ(*)μῶν ἔνδο[ξ(ον)] φιλανθρωπίαν ὡ[ς τ]ῶν ἀλιτηρ(ίων) Βλεμύων βαρβάρων ἐπὶ τῶν πάλαι ἡμῶν γονέων παραλαβ[όντων] \ εἰληφότων.

[53] *P.Vindob. G* 14307; trans. and ed. in Roger Bagnall and Bernhard Palme, "Franks in Sixth–Century Egypt," *Tyche* 11 (1996) 1–13, at 8–9.

[54] Ibid. 1. See Belisarius as a name in Martindale (n. 6 above) 3A 181–224.

case against a western barbarian presence in the Thebaid. The main obstacle for Bagnall and Palme is the difficulty "to explain how a group of real Frankish tribesmen would have come to act in Egypt."[55] Their hypothesis simply rejects the possibility of western barbarians in Egypt as implausible. An exploration of their reading of the papyrus reveals many of the same disciplinary obstacles that left the *Codex Gissensis* and the Oxyrhynchite Goths out of larger history of the Goths, albeit coming from the other side of the divide.

As Bagnall and Palme see it, the "Franks" would have been Franks in name only, constituting a military unit that had at one time contained Franks. In their opinion, any real Franks of the units would have long been replaced by locals or other non-Frankish troops. Their argument has a strong grounding in scholarship on the late antique east. The retention of an ethnic designation in a title is well attested in the later empire, and the *Notitia Dignitatum*, which reflects the eastern military divisions ca. 400, does list under the command of the *dux Thebaidis* an *ala prima Francorum* and a *cohors septima Francorum*.[56] But why would the 150-year continuation of a unit, which is otherwise unattested, seem inherently more plausible than a group of Frankish thugs stomping around sixth-century Egypt?[57]

The ferocity of the Franks was legendary in the east,[58] and Frankish marauding in both Gothic and Byzantine areas of Italy in the 550s would have offered the same opportunities for capture, redeployment, and mercenary positions available to other Germanic warriors at the time.[59] There is no reason why the military Frankish elite would be any less connected to imperial social networks than the Visigoths or the Vandals on the empire's fringe. As an anecdotal counterweight, we have the case of Amalafridas the Byzantine commander and son of Theodoric's niece with the Thuringian king Hermanifrid. Amaldafridas travelled to Constantinople with the defeated army of Witigis and seems to have visited his childhood friend the Frankish queen Radegund, at about the same time as our plaintiff was seeking redress in Hermopolis.[60] Well-connected barbarians could move easily across the Mediterranean.[61]

The need to find a seemingly more reasonable hypothesis than an actual Frankish presence prompts a strange reading of the evidence. The argument for a long-established unit under the name "the Franks" takes for granted that the troops were an enlisted unit—more likely to be locals—and not *bucellarii*—more likely to be imports. Bagnall and Palme put forward that the Franks' power to arrest, that is, "their apparent action here as part of the official apparatus" bars the possibility that "they can be anything except soldiers" in service of a local magistrate.[62] Here, the undergirding logic is

[55] Bagnall and Palme (n. 53 above) 4.
[56] *Notitia Dignitatum*, ed. 0tto Seeck (Berlin 1876) Or. XXXI 51, Or. XXXI 67 (pp. 65–66).
[57] Bagnall and Palme (n. 53 above) 6.
[58] Agathias, *The Histories*, trans. Joseph Frendo (Berlin 1975) 1.5.2–9.
[59] Procopius, *De bello Gothico* 6.35.1–4; Agathias, *The Histories* (n. 58 above) 1.1.7.
[60] Amory (n. 4 above) 358. 3A, 51.
[61] The Merovingian papyri made famous by Pirenne seem sufficient evidence of long-distance trade between Francia and Egypt during the period. Henri Pirenne, *Mohammad and Charlemagne*, trans. Bernard Miall (New York 1968) 91–93, 169–170.
[62] Bagnall and Palme (n. 53 above) 4. The plaintiff's letter does not speak of the men as soldiers of a unit or give any official nomenclature. While there are numerous sixth-century references to units with ethnic names, such as Scythians or Macedonians, the papyri nearly always allude to their military status in other

quite clear: barbarians could not be official soldiers.[63] Justinian's recent deployment of Scythians to Egypt at least provides the possibility that barbarians could still be in state service, and it seems that more evidence would be necessary to make the definitive call as to the Franks' status.

Further, the legitimacy of the Franks' arrest of an asylum-seeker is tenuous at best.[64] As a point of fact, the complaint is that that Franks performed an illegal arrest (ἐποίησαν παρά λογον καὶ τοῦτον ἠσφάλισαν). We cannot know if this means that they were not vested with proper arrest power or if they simply ignored the standard thirty days of preparation typically given to an accused individual. It seems perfectly reasonable that the Franks could have been the private strongmen of a local notable, who also happened to be a magistrate. The categorical distinction between public power and private authority has become the hotly debated cause célèbre of late antiquity, precisely because of such ambiguities in the papyri.[65] The powers and responsibility of local administrators versus private landlords in late antique Egypt have proven less than clear-cut. Even Palme in Bagnall's edited volume, *Egypt in the Byzantine World 300–700* submits that "in the papyri it is often difficult to determine whether such landowners serving as *pagarchs* acted as state officials or as private individuals."[66] Logically, the same is true for the men at their disposal. As Schmitt and Gascou have argued, *bucellarii* were just as much agents of state power as their employers vested with fiscal authority.[67]

Why could the Franks here not be barbarian *bucellarii*? One might suspect that to the violated party the difference between "real" soldiers and "private" *bucellarii* of the local official would be hard to distinguish, given that the above-mentioned henchmen

ways. They are "στρατιώται Σκύθοι," the "Σκυθοι Ἰουστινιανοι," or the "ἀριθμὸς τῶν γενναιοτατῶν Σκυθῶν." When a term like "the Scythians" is used to mean a unit, it usually comes as a partitive genitive following a stated soldier of the unit. *P.Cair. Masp.* I 67002:12; *P.Oxy.* XVI 1920:3; *SB* XXIV

[63] Bagnall and Palme (n. 53 above) 7 n. 24, follow an assumption going back ultimately to Jones, *History of the Later Roman Empire* (n. 34 above) 660–669, that "during or shortly after the reign of Justinian barbarian recruitment was dropped in favor of local enlistment." They contend that the plaintiffs would have identified the men as βουκελλάριοι not as Franks, if they had been private soldiers. They use the distinction made between the Goths and the *buccellarii* on the Apion payroll as evidence against *buccellarii* in general being referred to by an ethnic category.

[64] The legal status of asylum/church sanctuary is exceedingly complex in the *Theodosian Code*, although it is somewhat clarified by Justinian. See especially *Cod. Theod*. 9.45.4; Arrido Diego Manfredini, "'Ad ecclesiam confugere,' 'ad statuas confugere' nell'età di Theodosio I," *Atti di Accademia Romanistica Constantiniana. VI Convegno Internazionale* (Perugia 1986) 39–58. The classic study of asylum is Pierre Timbal, *La droit d'Asile* (Paris 1939); for the long continuation of ancient asylum into the Christian era, see Martin Dreher, *"Das Asyl in der Antike von seinen griechischen ursprüngen bis zur christlichen Spätantike*," *Tyche* 2 (1996) 79–96; For an excellent overview of the institutions of asylum and sanctuary, see Karl Shoemaker, *Sanctuary and Crime in the Middle Ages, 400–1500* (New York 2011) 9–43. For a discussion of arrest and accusation in the later empire, see Jill Harries, *Law and Empire in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge 2004) 119–122.

[65] Peter Sarris provides a generous historiographical background for the role of the great estate records and their relationship to our understanding of the late Roman state and public power, in his *Economy and Society in the Age of Justinian* (n. 9 above) 131–148. Sarris's conclusions have been recently supplemented and refined by Hickey. Hickey finds fault with Sarris and others for stretching papyrological evidence to fit their own models of the late Roman economy. See especially his introduction; Hickey (n. 12 above) 1–21.

[66] Palme (n. 41 above) 264.

[67] Jean Gascou, "L'institution de bucellaires," *Bulletin de l'Institut français d'Archéologie orientale du Caire* 76 (1976) 143–56, esp. 153f. Oliver Schmitt, "*Die Bucellarii:* Eine Studie zum militärischen Gefolgsschaftswesen in der Spätantike," *Tyche* 9 (1994) 147–174.

of the *pagarch* Menas could be called "robbers, rustics, and soldiers" (λῃστρικῆς τε καὶ παγανικῆς καὶ στρατιωτικῆς βοηθείας). As Gascou noted some time ago, "à cette époque, les Egyptiens semblent avoir pratiquement confondu les notions de 'soldats' et de 'Barbare.'"[68]

The locals of Egypt do not seem too confused about barbarian identities and we should listen to them. The injured parties above did not fail to specify their attackers' respective collective identity, if not their ethnicity. These texts suggest that like most late Romans, the residents of Egypt "thought they knew a barbarian when they saw one."[69] Why then should Bagnall and Palme presume that "the ethnic identity [of any transported Franks] would not be obvious any more"?[70] I see no reason to suppose that deployed Franks (either as soldiers or *bucellarii*) would no longer be ethnically identifiable within a generation or two of their arrival. The contemporaneous Goths and their coworkers from Ravenna, mentioned in PSI VIII 953 were still recognizable as such for payment records almost fifteen years after hostilities had ended in Italy. The plaintiffs of *P. Cair. Masp*. I 67009 were keen enough to identify a soldier of *Justin's Scythians* as well as the ethnicity of his Saracen assistants.

Whether either the Franks or the Goths above spoke their native language or sported their native attire is irrelevant, if their social cohesiveness or cohabitation marked them off to the neighboring communities as "Franks" and "Goths" respectively. Amory has already expressed concerns with Bagnall's casual use of ethnicity as a concept.[71] The theorization of ethnicity has been a hot topic in western medieval studies since the days of Barth and Wenskus, and barbarian identity or "ethnicity" has been shown to be highly subjective as well as flexible.[72] In late antiquity ethnicity was, to borrow Patrick Geary's term, a "situational construct" that could change with new circumstances.[73] The translation of a minority band to a new locale would be more than an appropriate situation for the group to reinforce its distinctiveness.[74] Similarly, a conflict over civil procedure and conduct would be an appropriate space for rhetoric emphasizing an opponent's barbarity.

Evidence such as the "Franks" papyrus begs for the rigorous theorization of bar-

[68] Gascou (n. 68 above) 155 n. 1.

[69] Michael Kulikowski, "Nation versus Army: A Necessary Contrast?" *On Barbarian Identity: Critical Approaches to Ethnicity in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Andrew Gillett (Turnhout 2002) 69–85, at 83.

[70] Bagnall and Palme (n. 53 above) 5.

[71] Amory (n. 4 above) 31 n. 70.

[72] For an overview of recent scholarship on barbarian identity, see Gillett (n. 69 above).

[73] Patrick Geary, "Ethnic Identity as a Situational Construct in the Early Middle Ages," *Mitteilungen der Anthropoligischen Gesellshaft in Wien* 141 (1983) 15–26.

[74] For the multiple ways through which Romans and barbarians crafted their identities in relation to one another, see the essays in Walter Pohl and Helmut Reimitz, eds., *Strategies of Distinction: the Construction of Ethnic Communities*, 300–800 (Leiden 1998), esp. Ian Wood's conclusion (297–303). For a recent overview of studies of barbarian identity formation, see Walter Pohl, "Nouvelles identités ehtniques entre Antiquité tardive et haut Moyen Âge," *Identité et ethnicité. Concepts, débats historiographiques, exemples (IIIe–XIIe siècles)*, ed. Véronique Gazeau, Pierre Bauduin, and Yves Modéran (Leiden 2008) 23–33. Other scholars, such as Charles Bowlus, have criticized the notion that barbarian identity developed out of mere "imagined communities." See Charles Bowlus, "Ethnogenesis Models and the Age of Migrations: A Critique," *Austrian History Yearbook* 26 (1995) 147–164; idem, "Ethnogenesis: The Tyranny of a Concept," in Gillett (n. 69 above) 241–256. Walter Pohl, "Ethnicity, Theory and Tradition: A Response," also provided a vigorous defense of the "ethnogenesis," or constructed identity, school in the same volume; see Gillett (n. 69 above) 221–239.

barian studies as much as it does for papyrological expertise. The insights of scholars such as Walter Pohl or Helmut Reimitz would have added richness to Bagnall and Palme's fascinating and otherwise rigorous analysis. In a similar vein, the *Codex Gissensis* Bible fragment should have been connected some time ago to the ample scholarship on late antique Egypt. We need not preclude the possibility that a group of western barbarians could make their way to Egypt any more than we should disregard the usefulness of papyri for writing the history of barbarian movements into the Roman world. Perhaps now the Goths and the Franks of Egypt will also have a place in the history books alongside their cousins within the European heartland. Evidence such as the Gothic Bible fragment or the Apion estate payroll demands that we medievalists be prepared to move between academic territories.

In the course of this brief essay, we have crisscrossed these scholarly divides and revealed at least one community of Goths participating in the vibrant economy that has so dazzled late Roman scholars in the past two decades. Perhaps we have also solved the mystery of the *Codex Gissensis* and why there are Franks in Egypt. Most important, by assembling objects that do not normally abut each other, as if in our own cabinet of curiosity, we produced a more dynamic and variegated picture of one of the most studied topographies of late antiquity. When we hereafter imagine the din and tumult of Byzantine village life, we should try to hear, amid Coptic squabbling and Greek accounting, the peculiar Latin of the barracks and maybe even a Gothic prayer or two.